

In the 1990s, the National Education Goals Panel emphasized “approaches to learning” as a distinct dimension of readiness, referring to aspects of children’s characteristic responses to learning situations, such as the child’s curiosity, flexibility, or persistence. In 2014, in *Building the Foundations of Future Success for Children from Birth Through Grade 3*, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts defined essential competencies in Approaches to Play and Learning as follows:

“All children from birth through grade 3 will develop curiosity about the world around them and excitement about exploration and learning; increase confidence about their ability to gain knowledge and skills; and build the ability to be proactive, independent, and collaborative learners.

Essential experiences provide opportunities for discovery, problem solving, and the acquisition of knowledge through interesting and interactive activities; promote creativity, cooperativeness, and persistence; and support individualized growth, learning, and multiple pathways to success.”

The skills described in the domain of Approaches to Play and Learning support higher order thinking, and are interconnected. These skills are developed as educators and families support children’s engagement, and independence in play and learning.

Approaches to Play and Learning



Initiative

Initiative: Initiative refers to a child’s ability to exhibit a spirit of independence and a sense of control over their choices. It also reflects the child’s willingness to pursue social relationships and to demonstrate a growing sense of self-sufficiency and confidence while interacting with others. They begin to make intentional choices/decisions with a specific goal or purpose in mind (e.g., what they will do, with whom, and under what conditions; what materials they will use). Other skills associated with goal setting include planning, predicting, and anticipating, as well as reflection, which requires *remembering with analysis* – thinking about what they learned, the processes used, what was interesting, and what they might do in a next step.

Standard APL1: The child will demonstrate initiative, self-direction, and independence.

By the end of preschool the child will ...	By the end of kindergarten the child will...
APL1aP. pursue own interests in play and learning.	APL1aK. plan and pursue personal interests and goals.

APL1bP. show eagerness to learn about a range of topics, ideas and tasks.	APL1bK. demonstrate eagerness to learn about and participate in a variety of topics, ideas, and tasks, particularly those that are unfamiliar.
APL1cP. demonstrate willingness to try new or challenging experiences.	APL1cK. independently seek new experiences and attempt increasingly complex challenges (physically, cognitively or socially).
APL1dP. begin to plan, set goals, and make decisions, with adult assistance (e.g., describe what he/she intends to do in an activity area, with whom, and under what circumstances).	APL1dK. engage in planning, goal-setting, and decisions with some assistance (e.g., decide with whom to work, under what circumstances; describe steps to reaching goals, processes/materials to be used,).
APL1eP. with adult support, use a variety of resources to explore materials and ideas.	APL1eK. independently use a variety of resources to find answers to questions or solve problems.

Curiosity

Curiosity: Curiosity relates to children’s natural tendencies as active learners to explore all aspects of the environment, from objects and people, to ideas and customs. It is through raising questions and discovering their own answers that children construct knowledge. Curiosity also implies “newness,” or going beyond what is known, exploration.

Standard APL2: The child will demonstrate eagerness and curiosity as a learner.

By the end of Preschool the child will ...	By the end of Kindergarten the child will...
APL2aP. ask “what” and “how” questions to gain information with adult support and modeling.	APL2aK. ask “why” questions about unknown future events and phenomenon, as well as about the here and now (e.g., how, what if).
APL2bP. try new sensory and other experiences (e.g., explore, examine, investigate, and experiment with materials, constructions, nature).	APL2bK. try a wide range of new experiences (e.g., materials, tasks, academic or physical skills), both independently and with peers or adults.

Engagement/Persistence

Engagement: refers to attentiveness or ability to focus on an activity with deliberate concentration despite distractions, and to sustain a plan sequence.

Persistence: children demonstrate persistence in their capacity to remain involved in what they are doing and to meet challenges appropriate to their level of development (staying longer in a center and engaging in an activity with increasing regularity). It also includes re-trying tasks to achieve success, or to reach a higher level of challenge or satisfaction.

Standard APL3: The child will be able to maintain focus and attention, and persist in efforts to complete a task.

By the end of Preschool the child will be able to...	By the end of Kindergarten the child will be able to...
APL3aP. with support, maintain concentration on a task or activity for short periods of time, until completed.	APL3aK. independently maintain focus on a project for a sustained period of time, until completed.

APL3bP. resist distraction and maintain attention to a task or activity (e.g., stories read aloud, demonstrations, different activities occurring simultaneously), with some support.	APL3bK. resist distraction and maintain attention to a task or activity (e.g., teacher instruction, multiple activities occurring simultaneously) with minimal support.
APL3cP. continue with, or return to activities after distractions or interruptions with adult support.	APL3cK. return to, or continue activities despite distractions or interruption.
APL3dP. maintain focus on a topic during a conversation or discussions.	APL3dK. contribute to discussions, holding in mind both the topic of discussion and the contributions of others.
APL3eP. cope with frustration or disappointment with adult/peer support.	APL3eK. independently persist in spite of frustration or disappointment.

Creativity

Creativity: Creativity is often associated with the expressive arts, however, creativity involves being able to cope with new situations and problems, as well as being able to see things from a different perspective. A creative child extends and elaborates on ideas and appreciates humor.

Standard APL4: The child will demonstrate creativity in thinking or use of materials.	
By the end of Preschool the child will...	By the end of Kindergarten the child will ...
APL4aP. use materials, tools, information and experiences in new and different ways.	APL4aK. use materials, tools, information and experiences to express ideas or convey meaning in new and different ways.
APL4bP. begin to recognize the difference between pretend/fantasy situations and reality with adult support (e.g., what could/could not happen in real life?)	APL4bK. describe or represent the difference between fantasy situations and reality.
APL4cP. begin to understand and use humor to gain attention (e.g., words, actions).	APL4cK. use humor to play with concepts/language or to engage or entertain others (e.g., jokes, riddles, songs, rhymes).
APL4dP. use imagination to express an idea or concept.	APL4dK. use imagination and other data sources to produce new ideas.
APL4eP. express ideas through art, music, movement, drama.	APL4eK. combine materials and equipment to express ideas through various creative arts.

Cooperative Play and Learning

Children gradually learn how to play and work together with a common interest or for a common goal. They share ideas, skills, knowledge, experience, and discoveries, and begin to recognize the benefits in working together. Cooperation begins to appear as children develop their abilities for reciprocity, taking turns and sharing. They continue to build cooperative skills as they engage in positive relationships, friendships, and collaborative projects. Cooperative learning connects with and supports social skills such as listening to and respecting the perspective of others, leadership, conflict resolution, and helping one another. Interacting with other students with different points of view helps to develop higher-order thinking skills, as they challenge each other's assumptions and bring different information the process, taking them to a higher level than they might have reached by themselves.

Standard APL5: The child will cooperate with others in play and learning.

By the end of Preschool the child will...	By the end of Kindergarten the child will...
APL5aP. suggest and listen to ideas for play with others (e.g., block play, puppets, games).	APL5aK. suggest and listen to ideas for play with others, and follow through with interdependence (e.g. board games, playground games, role play).
APL5bP. plan and negotiate play with two or more children (e.g., roles, responsibilities).	APL5bcK. collaborate and negotiate play with two or more children (e.g., who will go first; roles each participant will play; assuming various responsibilities).
SEL5cP. begin to use cooperative strategies in play with others (e.g., sharing materials, taking turns, listening to the needs of others).	SEL5cK. cooperate successfully in play and work with others with little prompting (e.g., listening and responding to needs of others; helping or advising one another).
APL5dP. cooperate with others to accomplish a task or solve a problem (e.g., offering and listening to suggestions; determining a process).	APL5dK. use cooperative learning strategies to accomplish a task or solve a problem (e.g., brainstorming ideas, steps; identifying resources; designating/accepting responsibilities; co-constructing processes to be used; sharing knowledge or discoveries).
APL5eP. begin to accept and share leadership.	SEL5eK. recognize and respect leadership (e.g., be a leader and respect others as leaders).
APL5fP. share their processes with adults or other children (e.g. demonstrating, explaining, or representing what they did).	APL5fK. explain (or represent) how cooperative strategies facilitated the process for accomplishing a task or solving a problem.

Problem Solving

This item refers primarily to cognitive or ethical problems. Social problem solving is addressed under “Conflict Management” in the SEL Standards. In this context, problem solving involves the child’s ability to look for or find multiple solutions to a question, task, problem, or dilemma. This ability is crucial for constructing knowledge as the child builds on prior experiences and integrates new information.

Standard APL6: The child will seek multiple solutions to a question, task, or problem.

By the end of Preschool the child will ...	By the end of Kindergarten the child will...
APL6aP. recognize and try to solve problems using a variety of methods (e.g., trial and error, discussion with others).	APL6aK. identify increasingly complex problems and strategies for solving them (e.g., experimentation, reasoning).
APL6bP. think of possible solutions and identify one to put into action.	APL6bK. identify pros and cons of possible solutions, then select and implement one.
APL6cP. recognize relationships between cause and effect (e.g., predict possible results and try out one or more solutions).	APL6cK. verify predictions and speculate about how or why the outcome might have been different.

Skill: Organizational Skills require that children use logical processes to consider similarities among materials or ideas and use logical processes to sort them into categories. Organization skills may be associated with mathematical thinking skills such as sorting and sequencing. Two important components of organization skills are task management and time management.

Standard APL7: The child will demonstrate organizational skills.

By the end of Preschool the child will be able to...	By the end of kindergarten the child will be able to...
APL7aP. use and care for materials appropriately with adult modeling/support (e.g., put things away; sort materials by categories such as color, shape).	APL7aK. independently use and care for materials appropriately (e.g., put away materials when finished, organize materials by categories).
APL7bP. regularly check cubby or personal space for take-home materials and projects to share with families.	APL7bK. gather personal belongings at end of day and act as a conduit for communication between home and school (back packing papers).
APL7cP. begin to develop processes for organizing tasks (e.g., describing or representing several steps in a process).	APL7cK. describe and implement multiple steps to be followed for an activity or project.
APL7dP. recognize the daily schedule, follow classroom routines, and identify what comes next.	APL7dK. demonstrate awareness of the weekly schedule (e.g. specials, half days, etc.), anticipate and prepare for coming events.
APL7eP. begin to manage time required for tasks or activities with adult assistance (e.g., how to prepare for or end an activity, task, or process).	APL7eK. manage time for tasks or activities with some support (e.g., recognize when and how to prepare for or close an activity, task or process).

Memory

Memory: ability to hold and manipulate information [OR ability to hold current ideas in mind while thinking, acting upon, and adding new ideas and information].

Standard APL8: The child will be able to maintain and recall information.

By the end of preschool the child will...	By the end of kindergarten the child will...
APL8aP. relate past experiences.	APL8aK. relate past experiences with details.
APL8bP. recall visual items/cues.	APL8bK. use intentional strategies to support visual memory (e.g., focusing on specific details, spatial placement, etc.).
APL8cP. recall auditory cues and comments.	APL8cK. recall auditory information.
APL8dP. recall events and use information to predict and ask questions.	APL8dK. apply prior knowledge to new situations, relationships, and problem solving.